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# Intersecting Inequalities:

## Research to Reduce Inequality for Immigrant-Origin Children and Youth

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1 We use immigrant-origin children as a term that encompasses both the first and second generation (Suárez-Orozco, Abo-Zena, & Marks, in press); the first generation is foreign born, the second generation is born in in the U.S., and both have immigrant-born parents.

# Overview

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As immigration has reached historic numbers in the United States, immigrant children have become an integral part of the national tapestry. Over 40 million (or approximately 12.5 percent) of people residing in this country are foreign born (Pew Hispanic Center, 2013), and 25 percent of children under the age of 18, a total of 18.7 million children, have an immigrant parent (Child Trends, 2013). This growth in this population has been rapid—in 1970 the population of immigrant-origin children stood at six percent of the total child population. It reached 20 percent by 2000 and is projected to be 33 percent by 2050 (Hernandez, 2014; Hernandez, & Napierala, 2012; Passel, 2011; Pew Hispanic Center, 2013).

While immigration has grown across all post-industrial nations (United Nations Development Program, 2009), inequality has risen at a steep rate on a variety of indicators, including income distribution, child poverty, residential segregation, and numerous academic outcomes (Picketty, 2014; Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2014).

Among the children of immigrants, inequality is manifested against a backdrop of wide disparity in post-migration conditions faced by new immigrants. Indeed, immigrant groups represent some of the most and least advantaged groups in the U.S. in terms of skills, education, and assets. Pre-migration disparities may shift as immigrants and their children interact with a variety of post-migration contexts in the U.S. While many immigrant-origin youth successfully integrate into their new land, faring as well as or even better than their native same-ethnicity peers (García Coll, & Marks, 2011; Suarez-Orozco, & Suarez-Orozco, 1995), others face significant challenges in their educational and psychosocial adaptation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, 2008). For instance, many

immigrant-origin students struggle academically, leaving school without acquiring the tools necessary to function effectively in the highly competitive, knowledge-intensive U.S. economy, in which limited education impedes wages and social mobility (Duncan & Murnane, 2011).

Children who find themselves at an intersection (Cole, 2009) of cumulative risks (Evans, Li, & Whipple, 2013) are at a distinct risk for poor academic and economic outcomes. Specifically, immigrant-origin children and youth are especially likely to face deep disadvantage if they are exposed to:

- Low levels of parental education and employment (Coleman, 1988; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001);
- Poverty (Hernández 2014; Child Trends, 2013);
- Newcomer<sup>2</sup> status; (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008);
- Language barriers (Hernández, 2014);
- Racialization as a “visible minority” group (Child Trends, 2013; Kunz, 2003; Ong, et al., 1996); and
- Undocumented status of self and/or parent (Yoshikawa, Kholoptseva, & Suárez-Orozco, 2013).

2 By newcomer, we mean the window of the first 10 years of arrival, which are tied to greatest economic vulnerabilities (Wight, Thampi, & Chau, 2011).

Cumulative intersectionality of these dimensions places many immigrant-origin children and youth at risk of compromised outcomes in arenas of education, economic success, and health and well-being (Cole 2009; Milner, 2013). Some of these disadvantages are shared by other vulnerable children in the U.S., but others are specific to children of immigrants (e.g., language learning, recency of arrival, and liminal legal status) (Suárez-Orozco, Abo-Zena, & Marks, in press).

In this paper, we consider what current research tells us about how inequality of opportunities (Carter & Reardon, 2014) and outcomes plays out along these six dimensions for immigrant-origin children and youth. We then turn our focus to two proximal contexts of development that are key to alleviating unequal opportunities and outcomes: education and family. Lastly, we recommend areas of future research that may inform policies, programs, and practices to reduce inequality for immigrant-origin children and youth.

# Intersecting Sources of Inequality

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How the children of immigrants fare is in large part determined by a constellation of factors associated with the family's pre-migration circumstances and post-migration experiences (Rumbaut, 1997; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2013a; Suárez-Orozco, Abo-Zena & Marks, in press). A family's particular pre-migration resources—economic, educational, social, and psychological—will provide distinctive starting points for children of different families as they enter the host country. Further, the post-migration contexts into which children and youth arrive—the labor-market, legal, neighborhood, and school settings—will be in varying degrees welcoming and conducive to success. In some cases, the reception is arid and daunting, while in others it is verdant and welcoming. Success is more likely with a positive constellation of pre-migratory resources and post-migratory contexts than with a negative one.

An intersectional perspective (Cole, 2009; Nuñez, 2013; Syed, 2010) suggests that disadvantage is conferred through membership in multiple social categories. Individuals experience marginalization “according to various combinations of social categories...which shape life chances” (Nuñez, 2013, p. 86). These areas of disadvantage are layered and inter-correlated, but it is useful to consider them separately (Cole, 2009). For instance, parental education and poverty are highly correlated, but many immigrant parents suffer a decline in employment (e.g. in occupational prestige or work conditions) when migrating. Most immigrants in the U.S. are English language learners. Many, but by no means all, undocumented immigrants are Latinos. Thus, in doing research with immigrant-origin children and youth, it is important to consider the implications of each social category, how various categories rise to the forefront in different contexts, and the ways that they structure inequality in opportunities and outcomes within the immigrant-origin

population and as across immigrant and native-born populations (Cole, 2009; Nuñez, 2013).

## Parental Education and Work

Parents of immigrant-origin children arrive in the U.S. encompassing the entire spectrum of educational attainment with the ends of the distributions disproportionately represented (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Some immigrant parents are among the most educated in our nation: immigrants constitute 25 percent of all physicians, 47 percent of scientists with doctorates, and 24 percent of science and engineering workers with bachelor's degrees (Kerr & Lincoln, 2010). Many others have had minimal education, however, and enter the agricultural, service industry, and construction sectors of the U.S. labor market (Passel, 2011; Schumacher-Matos, 2011). This diversity is reflected even *within* ethnic groups: for example, Census data show that 8 percent of immigrants from Taiwan, 18 percent from Hong Kong, and 40 percent from mainland China did not have a high school diploma in 1990 (Zhou, 2003). Other immigrants encounter a dramatic decrease in access to jobs befitting their pre-migration education and skill levels, resulting in underemployment or downward social mobility and occupational prestige (Davila, 2008; Yakushko, Backhaus, Watson, Ngaruiya, & Gonzalez, 2008; Yost & Lucas, 2002).

Variation in immigrant parents' educational attainment and employment conditions have tangible implications for the educational pathways of their children (Crosnoe & Turley, 2011; Han, 2008; Yoshikawa, 2011). More educated parents can provide their children a number of educational advantages, including more expansive vocabularies and interactions with text, help with homework, an understanding of school quality and after-school opportunities, and a better grasp of college pathways (Duncan &



Murnane, 2011, 2014; Louie, 2004; Suárez-Orozco, Gaytán, & Kim, 2010; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2013b). Parents with better employment opportunities experience more job advancement and wage growth, which leads to a greater likelihood of providing opportunities for their children to attend better quality schools and experience fewer school transitions (Duncan & Murnane, 2011, 2014; Suárez-Orozco, Gaytán, & Kim, 2010; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2013b; Yoshikawa, Weisner, & Lowe, 2006). On the other hand, parents entering sectors in which low-income immigrants are concentrated (agriculture, food processing, construction, e.g.) are disproportionately likely to experience very low wages, low levels of wage growth, and hazardous and low-autonomy working conditions (Bernhardt et al, 2009; Waldinger & Lichter, 2003). Their work may also take them to new destinations with harsh local immigration policies or schools unready to receive newcomer students (Massey, 2010).

## Poverty

Above and beyond education and employment, income poverty has deeply negative developmental (Luthar, 1999) and educational (Duncan & Murnane, 2011, 2014; Milner, 2013) implications for children. During the Great Recession, the proportion of immigrant-origin children living below the poverty level increased from 22 to 31 percent—faster than the increases among native-born children (Hernandez & Napierala, 2012). First-generation immigrant children are significantly more likely than their non-immigrant peers to grow up under the federal poverty line (FPL; 31 percent versus 20.2 percent of those in non-immigrant families) (Child Trends, 2013).<sup>3</sup> The second-generation (i.e., born in the U.S. of immigrant parents) fares only marginally better (Child Trends, 2013). If we use the 200 percent FPL threshold to represent low incomes, well over half of children with immigrant parents live in low-income households (Child Trends, 2013).

Living below the official poverty line is an important, but not sufficient, index of economic realities for immigrant-origin children. For immigrant-origin children, official calculations of family poverty fail to consider the economic complications of their transnational lives. Many immigrant families, particularly those who have recently arrived, maintain transnational frames of reference (de Haas, 2005; Levitt & Schniller, 2004). As such, they make remittances to spouses, children, parents, siblings, and

other family members remaining in the country of origin to support their medical, educational, and other basic expenses (DeSipio, 2002).<sup>4</sup> These regular distributions to kin abroad can result in fewer resources for the children residing in the host country. Moreover, poor immigrants are less likely than the native-born poor to receive federal in-kind and antipoverty benefits such as TANF, SNAP, the EITC and Medicaid (Bitler & Hoynes, 2011; Ku & Bruen, 2013). Consequently, thin resources may be stretched even thinner.

## Generation and Newcomer Status

For many decades, researchers have noted that generational status—i.e., whether children are born abroad (first generation), born in the United States to foreign-born parents (second generation), or born in the U.S. to U.S.-born parents (third generation or higher)—can be a powerful marker of developmental pathways and outcomes (Marks, Ejesi, & García Coll, 2014). Studies reveal some paradoxical trends, however. One might assume that the longer immigrant families have lived in the new country, the better they and their offspring will adapt. But emerging research suggests that a host of factors, including racism and acculturation to U.S. norms, may obstruct success for young people of the third or later generations (Harris, Jamison, & Trujillo, 2008; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Zhou, 2014).

The first generation—who on average live in poorer neighborhoods and families—fare as well and sometimes better in terms of health and academic outcomes than do their second and third generation peers from comparable racial/ethnic groups. First-generation students also express an “immigrant optimism” (Bahena, 2014; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Ogbu, 1991) through which they compare their lives in the U.S. to the circumstances their families left behind. The second and later generations may not have these comparative points of reference, but do have the advantages of full citizenship and more consistent exposure to English (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Third- and later-generation students often express lower academic engagement relative to the first and second generations of similar racial/ethnic backgrounds, though differences in

3 Child Trends. (2013). The official poverty rate is defined as the U.S. Bureau Census thresholds for poverty (e.g., \$23,492 per year for a family of four).

4 Migrants send over an estimated 400 billion dollars in remittances annually transnationally (World Bank, 2014). There is a wide variation between immigrant communities in terms of remittance levels, however (DeSipio, 2002). In general, there is an association between length of residency and immediacy of close kin and remittance levels (i.e., the longer one is in the host country the greater the remittances and the less immediate the relationships in country of origin, the less likelihood of sending of remittances). (DeSipio, 2002).

academic performance are less consistent (Fuligni, 1997; Kao, 1995; Tseng, 2004; Tseng & Lesaux, 2009).

New arrivals—i.e., children whose families migrated less than 10 years ago—face other sets of barriers. They are the most likely to be living under the poverty threshold, but are less likely to use safety-net programs. For some, this is due in part to undocumented status; for authorized immigrants who arrived after the federal welfare reform and immigration acts of 1996, this is in part due to restricted access (Bitler & Hoynes, 2011; Hernandez, et al, 2009).

Children of newcomer families, however, are the most likely to have parents who are married and working, factors that can serve a positive, protective function (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2009). But as immigration removes families from many of their old social supports, many immigrant parents find themselves unable to guide their children in educational or other institutional contexts (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008).

Newcomer families face disorientation, acculturative stress, and language barriers as they enter the new country (Berry, 1997; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Family separations and complicated reunifications, which frequently are part of the migration process, place a particular psycho-social and emotional burden upon families, children and youth in the initial years of migration (Suárez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim, 2010).

## Racialization

Immigrants who are racially distinct from the majority are at greater risk of experiencing discrimination than those who can “pass” as white (APA, 2012; Berry, 1997; Liebkind & Jaskinkaja-Lahit, 2000). While the previous large wave of migration hailed largely from Europe (97 percent), only 11 percent of today’s migrants originate from Europe, and 89 percent now arrive from Latin America, Asia, Africa, Oceania, or the Caribbean (Child Trends, 2013). In the United States, there have been recurring waves of xenophobia, most recently targeting Muslims (Sirin & Fine, 2008), Latinos (Chavez, 2008), and Asians (Yip, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2008). There is negative media coverage of immigration (Massey, 2008), an increase in hate crimes against immigrants (Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund, 2009), and exclusionary legislation enacted on the municipal, state, and federal levels (Carter, Lawrence, & Morse, 2011). The attributions for negative feelings typically focus on lack of documentation, skin color, and language skills, and income and

educational levels (Lopez, Morin, & Taylor, 2010).

As new immigrants are predominantly non-European “people of color,” their descendants may remain visible minorities for generations, with the risk of being treated as “perpetual foreigners” (Huynh, Devos, & Smalarz, 2011). The racialization experiences differ across ethnic groups, races, and phenotype with Asians, Latinos, and Blacks encountering a range of experiences in how the host society receives and treat them (Bailey, 2001; Lee, 2005; López 2001; Suárez-Orozco 2001, Waters, 2009). The risks associated with racialization range from workplace, wage, and housing discrimination (APA, 2012) to the well-documented physical and mental health tolls of covert discrimination and racial micro-aggressions (APA, 2012; Sue et al. 2007).

## Language

Eighty-one percent of all immigrant-origin children have parents who speak English and another language at home (Hernández, 2014). While over 460 languages are spoken across the nation, the most frequently spoken language among immigrant-origin families is Spanish (62 percent); 19 percent of families speak another Indo-European language, 15 percent speak an Asian or Pacific Island language, and the remaining 4 percent speak a different language (Kindler, 2002). Forty-four percent live in homes where parents speak very limited or no English; fourteen percent of immigrant children have parents who speak solely English at home; and the rest live in homes where one or both parents speak English along some continuum of fluency (Hernandez, 2014).

Navigating multiple languages is a developmental reality for most immigrant-origin children, representing both an opportunity and a challenge. Higher levels of English fluency and skill are, not surprisingly, correlated with higher levels of education and longer residency in the United States (Shin & Komiski, 2010). There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that dual-language learners—those who are exposed to more than one language during the course of their development—have some cognitive, meta-cognitive, and socio-emotional advantages over children who were exposed to only one language (Luk, De Sa, & Bialystok, 2011). For instance, bilingual children demonstrate higher levels of executive functioning skills in both inhibitory control and attention shifting (Child Trends, 2014; Barac, & Bialystok, 2012). Further, bilingual children show some advantages over monolingual children in both their language and literacy trajectories (Child Trends, 2014; Hammer, Lawrence, & Miccio, 2007) as well as their attention control and working memory

(Adesope, 2010).

In a nation that has ambivalent attitudes and policies about bilingualism, however, there are also some disadvantages associated with navigating a language other than English (García, 2014). The U.S. has a national legacy of being a “cemetery of languages” (Lieberson, 1981, p.89) with negative attitudes and policies towards bilingualism. Illustratively, over half of states have endorsed “English only” laws, three states have passed initiatives against bilingual education, and all federal offices that formerly included “bilingual” in their titles have now formally substituted “English language acquisition” (García, 2014). As such, there is no consistent second language education policy in place to address the educational needs of this population (Christensen & Stanat, 2007; Gándara, P. & Contreras, F. 2008; Olsen 2010). It is not surprising, then, that ELL students tend to do comparatively worse than their non-ELL peers on a variety of critical educational outcomes—including advancement across grades, graduation rates, and, more generally, in their performance across the academic pipeline—as they attend low-performing, highly segregated schools with limited and inconsistent services. (Kohler & Lazarín, 2007; Suárez-Orozco, Gaytán, & Kim, 2010).

## Undocumented Status

Today 5.2 million children in the U.S. reside with at least one undocumented immigrant parent. The vast majority of these children—4.5 million—are U.S.-born citizens; 775,000 are themselves unauthorized (Passel, Cohn, Krogstad, & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014). Children with undocumented parents constitute nearly one-third of all immigrant-origin children and about eight percent of all U.S.-born children.

There is emerging evidence that undocumented status is associated with a number of developmental vulnerabilities. Parents’ undocumented status is associated with lower levels of cognitive development and educational progress across early and middle childhood (Brabeck & Xu, 2010; Ortega et al., 2009; Yoshikawa, 2011). By adolescence, having an undocumented parent is associated with higher levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms (Potochnick & Perreira, 2010). A recent large-scale study of Mexican-origin young adults showed that having an undocumented mother, relative to an authorized one, was associated with between 1.25 and 1.5 fewer years of school attendance (Bean, Leach, Brown, Bachmeier, & Hipp, 2011).

Undocumented immigrants come from all nationalities and backgrounds—some overstay a visa while others cross over our northern or southern borders (Hoefer, Rytina, & Baker, 2012). But the current strategy of detainment and deportation has been almost entirely focused on Latinos and our southern border (Kanstrom, 2010; MALDEF, 2014). Nearly two million people have been deported during the Obama administration; while it is estimated that less than 90 percent of undocumented immigrants are of a combined Mexican, Central American, and South American origin (Immigration Policy Center, 2012), 96.7 percent of those deported have been of Latino descent, placing a disproportional stress and disruptions on Latino families (MALDEF, 2014).

Finally, intersectionality is amplified in this domain as undocumented status is highly correlated with poverty as and low parental education (Yoshikawa, Kholoptseva, & Suárez-Orozco, 2013).



# Key Contexts for Alleviating Inequality

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For all children, schools and family are two contexts that have critical implications for development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Below we consider how these contexts may have implications for alleviating unequal opportunities and outcomes for immigrant-origin children and youth in particular.

## Improving educational contexts

In the U.S., education has long been the centerpiece of accounts of socio-economic mobility (Hochschild, Scovronick, & Scovronick, 2004). Indeed, immigrant parents often frame their migration narratives in terms of offering better educational opportunities to their children (Hagelskamp, Suárez-Orozco, & Hughes, 2010).

In the post-war era, ample educational opportunities in the United States allowed mobility, with children usually surpassing their parent's educational attainment (Duncan & Murnane, 2014). In recent decades, however, there has been a significant reversal in these patterns and fortunes, and the nation now faces a significant “crisis of inequality” (Duncan & Murnane, 2014) in education. Rather than providing an opportunity to even the playing field, many educational policies and practices have contributed to amplifying pre-existing disparities. In what ways does the crisis of educational inequality pertain to immigrant-origin children and youth? Where should future research focus to leverage positive change in practices, programs, and policies?

### *English Language Instruction*

An important challenge for immigrant-origin children relates to mastering content while concurrently attaining academic language proficiency in English. Although immigrant-origin children master conversational language relatively quickly, academic language—i.e.,

the ability to detect nuances in multiple-choice tests or argue persuasively in an essay or in a debate—is attained, on average, after 5 to 7 years of high-quality language instruction (Cummins, 2000; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). Complicating academic language mastery is that many immigrant-origin children enter school having had interrupted or limited schooling prior to arrival. These children may also have weak literacy foundations in the first language, or speak more than one language (Olsen, 1995).

Our nation's inconsistent language acquisition practices present a variety of obstacles in the process of new language attainment (García, 2014; Gándara & Contrera, 2008; Olsen, 2010; Thomas & Collier, 2002), and research considering the efficacy of second-language instruction and bilingual programs reveals contradictory results. This should not be surprising given that there are nearly as many models of bilingual and second language programs as there are school districts (Thomas & Collier 2002).

English Language Learners (ELL) are typically placed in some kind of second language instructional setting (e.g., pull-out programs, sheltered instruction, English as a Second Language [ESL], and dual-language instruction) as they enter their new school (Gándara & Contreras 2008), but, in many districts, students are transitioned out of these settings with little rhyme or reason (Olsen, 2010; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2008; Thomas & Collier 2002). English as a Second Language (ESL) programs often consist of limited pull-out instruction and academic support, as well as immersion in regular classes. In ESL classrooms are learners from many different countries speaking many different languages. Transitional bilingual programs focus on providing academic support to newcomers as they transition out of their language of origin into English. Dual-language immersion classes

involve students' learning half of the time in English and half in a target language (e.g. Spanish, Mandarin, etc.), with half of the class being native speakers of English and the other half native speakers of the target language. Given the predominance of Spanish speaking ELLs, the majority of program implementation and research in the U.S. has been done on programs targeting this specific language group (Kohler & Lazrín, 2007).

Well-designed and implemented programs ease transitions, provide academic scaffolding, and nurture a sense of community (Padilla, Lindholm, Chen, Duran, Hakuta, Lambert, & Tucker, 1991). There is, however, a significant disparity in quality of instruction between settings (August & Hakuta 1997; Thomas & Collier 2002). Many bilingual programs face implementation challenges characterized by inadequate resources, uncertified personnel, and poor administrative support (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Because many bilingual programs lack robust support nationwide, they often do not offer the breadth and depth of courses that immigrant-origin students need to get into a meaningful college track. There is an ever-present danger that once a student enters the "ESL," "bilingual" track, or English Language Acquisition track, he or she will have difficulty switching to the "college bound track."

### Assessment

Schools are seldom focused on meeting the needs of dual language students—at best they tend to be ignored, and at worst they are viewed as contributing to low performance on state mandated high-stakes tests (Menken, 2008; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2008). There is considerable debate on the role of educational assessments in general, and high stakes assessments in particular, in contributing to unequal outcomes for English Language Learners (APA, 2012; Menken, 2008; Solórzano, 2008; Valenzuela, 2005). Standardized tests used to screen for learning differences and high stakes decisions were largely designed and normed with middle class populations (Agbenyega & Jiggetts, 1999), or they were adapted from work with those populations (Birman & Chan, 2008). Such tests assume exposure to mainstream cultural knowledge and fail to recognize culture of origin content knowledge (Rhodes, Ochoa, & Ortiz, 2005; Solano-Flores, 2008). This can lead to underestimates of students' abilities and competencies. Timed tests penalize second-language learners who process two languages before they settle on a single answer (Solano-Flores, 2008). And when culturally or linguistically sensitive approaches are not utilized, individuals' needs often go unrecognized or, conversely, they can be over-pathologized (APA, 2012; Kieffer, et al., 2009; Suzuki, et al., 2008).

We should systematically recognize the sources of bias in assessment, particularly with second-language learners. Solano-Flores (2008) argues that the sources of bias are reflected in "Who is given tests in what language by whom, when, and where?" (Solano-Flores 2008). When students do poorly on tests, it cannot simply be assumed that they lack the skills (though in some cases that is a partial explanation). For instance, students may not have been exposed to culturally-relevant materials or do not have the vocabulary in English. Sometimes this issue is one of retrieval time; second-language learners may simply need more time to process two languages. Double negatives are an issue for second-language learners. Unfamiliar test formats especially place newcomer immigrants at a disadvantage. Issues of cultural and linguistic fairness in assessment are a critical area of research importance (Solano-Flores & Trumbull, 2003; Solano-Flores, 2008) that must constantly and systematically be addressed when working with this population (APA, 2012).

In the current climate of high stakes educational assessment, school districts are sometimes pressured to prematurely reclassify students from English Language Learners to Fluent English Proficient (Escamilla, Mahon, Riley-Bernal, & Rutledge, 2003). In many other cases, immigrant students languish as "long term ELLs" (Olsen, 2010). With poorly implemented school assessments and a miscellany of language learning policies, there is wide variability between districts and states in this classification—seldom is reclassification tied to the research evidence on what it takes to attain the level of academic language proficiency required to be competitive on standardized assessments (Cummins, 2000; Kieffer, Lesaux, Rivera, & Francis, 2009). As higher stakes have become attached to standardized tests, this issue has heightened consequences for English language learners and the schools that serve them.

### Socio-emotional Supports in Schools

As they enter new schools post-migration, immigrant-origin children and adolescents, especially newcomers, face an array of socio-emotional challenges, including acculturative stress and having to rebuild family relationships after long separations (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, 2008).

Some of the challenge of adjustment is related to language acquisition (Olsen, 2010). Before the child acquires the ability to competently express herself she often goes through a silent phase where she becomes invisible in the classroom (Merchant, 1999; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, 2008). This is a period of time when students can also become vulnerable to peer bullying

(Scherr & Larson, 2010; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, 2008; Qin, Way, & Mukherjee, 2008) and low teacher expectancies (Weinstein, 2002).

Understanding and then addressing student needs during the critical transition phase for newcomer students is an important area for intervention. Emerging research shows that schools that are strategic in their approaches to helping newcomer youth adjust to their new environs may be poised to help them be more successful in their psychosocial adaptation and educational performance (Sadowski, 2013; Suárez-Orozco, Martin, Alexandersson, Dance, & Lunneblad, 2013).

For instance, advisory programs that partner students with one another and with older peers can foster communities of learning and emotional support. In these advisory groups, students are encouraged to openly discuss a range of topics, from difficulties with a class to missing families and friends back home to interpersonal issues. As part of classroom instruction, writing prompts may also serve to encourage students to share their personal migration experiences and engage them in class discussions. Activities like these help students recognize that they are not alone in facing the difficulties of transition, and also help teachers get to know their students (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2013). Little research has been done, however, to determine what works for what students under what circumstances in school contexts.

### *State and Federal Education Policies*

Relative to youth from native-born families, immigrant-origin youth are over-represented in highly segregated and impoverished urban settings (Fry, 2008; Orfield & Lee, 2006; Orfield, 2014). These children have little contact with mainstream, middle-class Americans, and are effectively isolated in terms of race and ethnicity, poverty, and language (Duncan & Murnane, 2013; Fry, 2008; Massey & Denton 1993; Orfield & Lee 2006; Sampson, 2012; Schwartz & Stiefel, 2011; Orfield & Lee 2006). This “triple segregation” is associated with a variety of negative educational experiences and outcomes, including overcrowding, low expectations, low academic standards, low achievement, school violence, and high dropout rates (Gándara and Contreras 2008; Tseng & Lesaux 2009). Importantly, this means that immigrant youth are served largely by Title I schools and are thus profoundly influenced by the requirements set out in federal and state policies. It is critical for future research to examine the implications of these policies for immigrant youth.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) had specific components focused on ELLs (Capps et al. 2005).

Specifically, the law required annual English Language Proficiency exams for ELL students. All students were tested in math and science beginning in their first year of enrollment, though accommodations were made to provide the exams to ELL students in their mother tongue. More contentious were the new federal regulations regarding English Language Arts (ELA) and reading assessments. In particular, ELLs were not supposed to be tested using the same exam as native speakers, but regulations did not dictate to states the contents of the ELA exam. Though research has consistently shown that, no matter the age, developing academic English-language learning takes time (Cummins, 2000), many states used standard ELA exams after one year of enrollment to assess Adequate Yearly Progress. Thus an impossible benchmark was set that would penalize schools with high numbers of ELLs, placing them at risk of losing standing and funding under NCLB (Escamilla, Mahon, Riley-Bernal, & Rutledge, 2003).

Like NCLB, Common Core State Standards place considerable emphasis on standardized assessments and are highly English language dependent. Math assessments, for example, require not only solving computation problems, but responding to word problems—tasks that require English language skills. This large-scale reform effort has potentially huge implications for ELLs, and efforts have begun to adapt interventions to support the Common Core for ELL students (International Reading Association, 2012).

By documenting which groups and sites are doing well in comparison to others, and by providing insights into the processes account for differences, as well as alternative strategies for assessment, research can begin to shed light into practices, program, and policies that can make a difference for this population.

### *Post-Secondary Access*

The children of our highest educated immigrants are entering colleges and universities in unprecedented numbers, but many other immigrant-origin children are the first in their family to venture to college and have limited guides in their college planning and decision-making.

If immigrant-origin students enter college, they are most likely to enter community colleges (Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, 2011). Although they may have gained entrance at higher ranked institutions, these students are often debt adverse and their families may not fully recognize the value of higher status colleges (Fry, 2004). Further, many immigrant-origin students tend to

select to commuting over living on campus. While this may be both culturally concordant and financially sensible, research shows that commuter students are at less likely to engage on campus and are at greater risk of dropping out (Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeong, 2007).

College persistence and attainment have gained national attention as just over half of students who enter college complete their degrees (Shapiro, Dundar, Chen, Ziskin, Park, Torres, & Chiang, 2012). These data are not broken down by immigrant-origin populations but it is likely, considering their particular challenges, that these youth face even more dismal outcomes.

For instance, some subgroups of immigrant-origin students have poor access to financial aid. Latinos, for example, are awarded the lowest average amount of financial aid by type and source of aid among all racial/ethnic groups (Gándara and Contreras, 2009). Unauthorized students have no access to federal grants and on some campuses are charged out of state tuition rates (Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, & Suárez-Orozco, 2015). Data (which do not differentiate immigrant from non-immigrant) show that Latino students are also much more likely than their white or Asian peers to study part time while working, rather than relying on other funding sources such as parental support, financial aid, loans, or scholarships (King, 1999).

Barriers to college persistence, however, are not only economic. First generation college students, who may have little support or guidance, may suffer from “imposter syndrome” (Kolligian & Sternberg, 1991) and feel distanced from their family during return visits (Brilliant, 2000). Many do not find a community of college peers with whom they can identify and feel comfortable. They often report difficulty finding faculty members on campus and mentors who have common interests or who are willing to engage them (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008).

## Enhancing Familial Contexts

The family is, of course, the most salient context of development for children, shaping their experiences and outcomes (Brofenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Issues concerning parenting, parents’ mental health, and family conflict have important influences on children, but there is, to date, limited evidence on their roles in predicting immigration-related inequality among youth (*see* Abe-Kim et al., 2007; Pong, Hao, & Gardner, 2005 for recent reviews on these topics). Here, we consider three structures that have implications for immigrant families and that

may serve as levers for reducing disparities: access to antipoverty programs, parents’ human capital (i.e., education and job skills), and inclusion in U.S. institutions.

### *Antipoverty Programs*

Because immigrant-origin children and youth are more likely to be living in poverty than their counterparts from native-born families (Hernandez, 2013), reducing income poverty and its correlates may be a promising route to the reduction of inequality in life-course outcomes. The U.S. safety net represents a group of programs and policies intended to reduce hardships associated with poverty among families. Many of the benefits are contingent on work effort (TANF; the EITC; child care subsidies, which include support for before- and after-school care; SNAP, or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), and some are not (e.g., Medicaid and SCHIP, the State Child Health Insurance Program). Recent studies show lower rates of enrollment in these programs among low-income immigrant parents, even among those eligible for these programs, than among their native-born low-income counterparts (Bilter & Hoynes, 2011). Would increasing access to these programs reduce immigration-related inequality? This is not clear from existing evidence, as the relative benefits of the programs for key developmental outcomes have generally not been examined.

What we do know concerns barriers to program enrollment. Most studies have used case study methods, including interviews with service providers, agency administrators, and staff in community-based organizations. This research shows that knowledge about programs, both in quantity and in quality, is often lower among newcomer parents when compared to native-born parents (Perreira et al., 2012). In addition, general outreach efforts for safety-net programs are often limited to English and sometimes Spanish, thus not meeting the language needs of the large range of immigrant newcomers. Immigrant families may also believe that enrolling their children or youth in benefits will require later payback or negative consequences on their immigration status. This “chilling” effect of recent policies on immigrant access to services has been especially prominent in the wake of the welfare reform and immigration policies of 1996 (Capps, 2001; Van Hook, 2003). In particular, legal immigrants eligible for programs such as TANF and Food Stamps / SNAP showed reductions in enrollment rates following welfare reform. These reductions were larger for post-enactment legal immigrants than their pre-enactment counterparts, who were not targeted by the law (Bitler & Hoynes, 2011). Such analyses have not been extended to study whether the effects of the Great Recession on immigrant enrollment have been different than that for native-born families.



In general, there has been very little study of how family enrollment in TANF or in-kind supports (e.g., health, as in Medicaid / SCHIP; food, as in SNAP; housing, as in public housing or Section 8; heat and energy assistance, as in LIHEAP) might reduce inequalities between low-income immigrant youth and their low-income native-born counterparts.

A natural extension of such research would consider whether interventions to increase enrollment in such programs reduce these inequalities. For example, both agency administrators and community-based organizations have been responsive to barriers to enrollment (e.g., Crosnoe et al., 2012); however, virtually none of the policy and program innovations—ranging from provision of outreach information in a larger range of languages and modalities to regular information sharing across immigrant-serving organizations and government agencies, and provision of models of case management that are inclusive of the range of immigrant families' needs—have been evaluated using rigorous research designs.

In addition to in-kind programs, tax policies designed to reduce poverty have not been examined relative to low-income immigrant families. Despite high work levels of low-income immigrant parents, they enroll in the earned income tax credit—the largest single antipoverty policy of the U.S.—at lower rates than native born low-income families (Capps & Fortuny, 2006). The EITC has been linked to higher student achievement scores and lower biomarkers of stress among mothers (Dahl & Lochner, 2008), but no studies examine its effect on immigrant-origin families, in particular. Does enrollment in the EITC or other tax-based antipoverty policies (e.g., the child tax credit) reduce income-poverty related inequality for immigrant families? To our knowledge, no data exist on this question.

### **Parental Educational Interventions**

Parental education remains a powerful predictor of educational, economic, and life-course outcomes among immigrant-origin children and youth. The existing research consistently shows that higher levels of parental education are associated with better educational, behavioral, and adult economic outcomes among their children (Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 2014). In addition, job skills in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century economy have changed in ways that have increased inequalities in wages, wage growth, and work conditions (Goldin & Katz, 2009; Levy & Murnane, 2012).

First-generation immigrant parents have substantially lower levels of education and English language fluency, on average, than their native-born counterparts, even after accounting for other indicators of socioeconomic status such as income and employment (Masten, Liebkind, & Hernandez, 2012). This is partly an artifact of education systems in countries of origin, mainly in Latin America and Asia, that have lagged behind the U.S. system in access to primary and especially secondary education (UNESCO, 2013 Global Monitoring Report).

Although enrollment in ESL and other forms of adult education is a frequently cited goal among low-income immigrant parents (Yoshikawa, 2011), research shows that retention in such adult education programs and attainment of educational degrees and qualifications occur at very low rates among this group (McHugh, Gelatt, & Fix, 2007). Quality appears to be an issue in ESL programs; one quasi-experimental evaluation of a curricular and teacher professional development program showed positive effects on a test of basic English skills (Waterman, 2008). There is generally a dearth of research on the effects of educational interventions for immigrant adults, particularly regarding potential effects on their children.

### **Inclusion in U.S. Institutions**

Recent evidence suggests that extreme levels of exclusion from U.S. institutions place undocumented youth and those with undocumented parents at particular risk with regard to educational outcomes (Abrego, 2013; Gonzales, 2011). A small but growing body of research has begun to address this issue, but thus far it lacks specifics regarding policy and practice responses that may improve outcomes.

Several kinds of programs and policies may reduce the disparities in educational and well-being outcomes between youth affected by unauthorized status directly (either by having a parent with that status or having it themselves) and those who are not. First and most fundamentally, policies that provide a pathway to citizenship may bring these youth out from the shadows of unauthorized status. The Obama administration recently implemented Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), a regulation providing temporary, 2-year reprieve from deportation and legal working status to certain unauthorized individuals under the age of 31 who came to the U.S. prior to age 15. States have also taken a variety of policy directions, some relatively harsh (e.g., Arizona's SB1070 legislation), and some more generous (e.g., providing temporary reprieve from local deportation for certain categories of unauthorized workers in Utah). The effects of state policy variation on youth have not been investigated.



Second, other program approaches may increase access to federal safety-net programs among U.S.-born children and youth in families with differing documentation statuses (Crosnoe et al., 2012). Not all organizational and policy approaches need to identify this group directly, however; organizational practices can also be implemented for low-income immigrant families. These may include simplifying paperwork so that immigrant parents can enroll their citizen children, providing identification drives to ease enrollment in community spaces like libraries, or offering legal services (in addition to social and educational services) in trusted settings like immigrant-serving organizations or schools. No such approaches have been evaluated using rigorous causal methods for their impacts on family access to safety-net programs nor on child or youth outcomes.

Finally, the work conditions of unauthorized parents and youth have been demonstrated to be substantially worse than those of other low-wage workers, even within ethnic groups (Bernhardt et al., 2009; Yoshikawa, 2011). Efforts to improve the work conditions of the unauthorized could improve the parent employment-related factors that have been shown to be associated with youth achievement and well-being in the general low-wage population. Employment-related factors include higher wages and wage growth, shorter and more standard work hours, and greater complexity and opportunities for growth in job duties (Yoshikawa, Weisner, & Lowe, 2006). Few interventions to improve work conditions along these dimensions have been evaluated relative to effects on children and youth of unauthorized parents, or those youth who are unauthorized themselves.

# Considerations for Future Research

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Thus far, we have laid out six critical dimensions of inequality for immigrant-origin children and youth, and have discussed the ways that they are reflected in policies and programs related to education and families. We turn now to the promise of the title of this paper by providing four broad considerations for future research.

## Move Immigrants From the Margins to the Center of Policy Research

Children of immigrants represent one-quarter of the child population, yet they have long been at the margins in the design and implementation of policies and programs and research to inform them. When we consider the major educational policy initiatives of the past five years—NCLB, Common Core, teacher evaluation, and charter schools—there is far too little empirical knowledge concerning immigrant-origin youth to inform policy development and implementation. We risk having only a sparse understanding of whether these interventions have the same or differing effects for immigrants (or subgroups of immigrants), and little empirical guidance on how those efforts might be improved. If education policy researchers want to be more relevant to decision making, they need to address the research needs of a changing student population and the teachers, school leaders, districts, and states who serve them.

To foster this work, data on immigrant background will need to be more routinely collected in district, state, and national datasets, as well as in evaluation studies. Publicly funded studies are woefully inadequate for studying our 21st Century population. For instance, generation of immigration has not been collected in the decennial Census since 1970, and is not collected currently in the

American Community Survey (ACS) or in most school district datasets. Thus, researchers and policymakers may know how Asians and Latinos compare to Whites and Blacks, or how designated ELLs compare to non-ELLs, but we know very little about subgroups, such as children of immigrants with advanced educational degrees vs. only primary education from particular countries. Even evaluation studies conducted with substantial immigrant populations do not routinely collect data on generation or recency of immigration. We therefore typically do not know how recent immigrants differ in their uptake of services (and the effects of their participation) from their peers with longer histories in the U.S. Similarly, districts often do not collect detailed information on ethnicity or country of origin; the data requirements in place since passage of No Child Left Behind, for example, do not consider immigration separately from very broad racial/ethnic categories.

Conversely, large-scale studies focused on immigration often do not capture developmentally important outcomes among a range of youth of different ages. Landmark studies such as the New Immigrant Survey or the Immigration and Intergenerational Mobility in Metropolitan Los Angeles (IMMLA) incorporate very little in the way of youth outcomes beyond educational attainment, and are generally more focused on adults. Thus, the question of what contexts, policies, and programs might reduce inequality in outcomes for immigrant-origin youth falls into an immense data gap.

While we have focused on education and family support, the general notion that immigrants must be more seriously part of policy research applies to other sectors, including housing, juvenile and criminal justice, and child welfare. For example, in the recent wave of research on unauthorized status, it has been observed that housing quality is

unusually poor among the unauthorized and mixed-status families, even in comparison to other low-income populations. Yet policies that may address the effects of poor housing on youth development among immigrant-origin families have been largely ignored.

## Deepen & Broaden Research on Policies & Programs that Target Immigrants

The range of policies that are directly related to immigration, including detention, deportation, border enforcement and immigration reform, have begun to foster research on children and youth (Kalil and Chen 2008; Suárez-Orozco, Abo-Zena, & Marks, in press), but the field is still at a nascent stage. It is certainly complicated by the challenges of asking directly about documentation status and contacts with federal or local authorities.

As we write this paper, our news is filled with stories of deportations. Some directly involve immigrant children. Others divide citizen children born in the U.S. from their undocumented parents. The majority of research on the undocumented has understandably focused on Latinos, but estimates indicate that substantial populations of undocumented Asians from China, the Philippines, India, Korea, and Vietnam now reside in U.S. cities (Hoefer, Rytina, & Baker, 2012). These experiences of these particular groups are virtually invisible in our social sciences.

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) memorandum and the Immigration Accountability Executive Action provide short-term reprieves from deportation, access to Social Security numbers, and legal work status for some (i.e., undocumented minors, so called “DREAMers” who arrived during their childhood, and the parents of citizen children— as many as half of the unauthorized in the U.S.). Some research on the effects of the 2012 version of this regulation has begun (Gonzales & Terriquez, 2013; Wong, 2014; Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, 2015), but disparities between the unauthorized who enrolled versus those who did not, or between unauthorized and documented immigrants, have yet to be estimated. It will be important to do work that shows the benefits and limitations of these initiatives, and the extent to which they reduce existing inequalities that affect unauthorized youth or those from mixed-status families. Moving forward, more work will be needed to examine the implications DACA and non-DACA participants’ work and school access to resources, participation in the education, the labor market, and civil society.

Beyond work that focuses on policies related to unauthorized status, the effects of various visa and residency statuses is also be an important area of inquiry. The preferential provisions aimed at more highly educated immigrants have almost never been studied in relation to youth development. The divided nature of immigrant-origin youth outcomes, both some of the most positive and some of the most problematic in the country, has thus not been linked back to the full range of immigration policies that affect entry flows, initial contexts of reception, or longer-term developmental trajectories.

## Avoid a Deficit Framework in Inequality Research with Immigrant-Origin Children

Research on immigrants has much to offer the broader field of inequality research. Fueled by streams of theorizing across sociology, anthropology, and psychology, substantial research on immigrants emphasizes the strengths of children and families of color. Rather than pursuing a “deficit model” wherein ethnic (or immigrant-origin) differences are interpreted predominantly as deficits, some scholars attend to immigrants’ strengths—optimism about opportunities in the new land, strong academic motivation, and a firm sense of family interdependence—that contribute to positive outcomes (Bahena, 2014; Gándara 1995; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995; Tseng & Lesaux, 2009). Being an immigrant carries with it stresses and barriers to access, but most first-generation immigrants bring a range of resources, both social and psychological, that enable successful navigation of the new land. For instance, dense social networks in immigrant enclaves also create opportunities for employment (Zhou, 2014).

As an example of the productivity of this approach, consider the many hypotheses explored in work on the “immigrant paradox” (the pattern according to which first-generation immigrants show more positive health outcomes than predicted based on their socioeconomic characteristics) (Marks, Ejedi, & Garcia Coll, 2014).

The community, network, and family practices and resources that lead to positive outcomes among immigrant-origin youth are relevant for research on inequality because they provide new avenues for development of programs and policies. To the extent that programs do not simply focus on reducing risk but also on promotive and protective processes, our inventory of programs to reduce inequality is enriched. Yet the areas of research that are relevant to these processes have not

often integrated intervention research. The very large literature on positive sequelae of racial and ethnic identity among youth of color in the United States, for example, is predominantly a developmental literature, not an intervention literature. Whether the focus is peer relationships, identity processes, access to cultural capital or leadership, activism and organizing, we lack the evaluation and implementation studies that can help us understand whether interventions strengthening these processes can reduce inequality within immigrant-origin youth or between immigrant-origin and other youth.

## Conduct Research with Families of Immigrant-Origin Children

Immigration is most often a family affair. Parents frequently cite better opportunities for their children as the primary motivation for migration (Hagelskamp, Suárez-Orozco, & Hughes, 2010). Research on family processes beyond parenting, however, is still understudied regarding youth outcomes or distributions of those outcomes. Immigrant adults' work, for example, is too infrequently integrated with research on their children's outcomes. Research on the effects of job skills interventions among immigrant parents has been virtually absent in the workforce development literature. Recent developments in workforce intervention, such as sector-specific approaches (Glover & King, 2010) have not distinguished effects for immigrant versus non-immigrant workers. Low-income immigrant parents, who are particularly likely to experience very poor work conditions, face challenges in building the job skills that may provide a meaningful career ladder out of poverty, including language barriers in workforce development programs, lack of vocational and contextualized (job sector-specific) ESL programs, and a dearth of job-referral networks leading to better employment (McHugh et al., 2007).

The sociological research on recent changes in family structure in the United States could be usefully harnessed in research on diverse immigrant families. Some particular forces affecting immigrant families disproportionately, such as parent-child separation or other complex transnational patterns (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2013b), have already been noted. But, to the extent that they affect immigrant-origin youth, other aspects such as separation, divorce, multi-partner fertility, etc., are surprisingly understudied (Cere, & McLain, 2013). For example, in educational circles, much stock is placed in "parent" involvement, but immigrant-origin children are raised in a wide variety of family dynamics, by grandparents or older siblings, or in multigenerational households with cousins, aunts, and uncles (McWayne & Melzi, 2014). To appropriately support them, we have much to learn about the specific circumstances and experiences across this array of structures.

# In Closing

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Immigrant-origin young people are now, and will continue to be, a diverse and demographically important segment of our youth population. As the proportion of our nation's children of immigrant origins increases further from its current historic high, a new generation of research is essential to understand and intervene in shifting patterns of disparities. Future research has an important role to play in informing, testing, and yielding new knowledge about efforts to reduce inequality both within this

population and between it and other groups.

In this essay, we have identified some potentially productive avenues for future work at the intersection of research, practice, and policy to reduce immigration-related inequality in the U.S. Individually and collectively, these levers for change may serve to support the wellbeing of immigrant-origin children and youth, whose pathways are deeply intertwined with the future of our nation.



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